

LEADER Programmes for Rural Economic Development – Progress Report

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Purpose of the Report

To brief Area West Committee on the progress with establishing district wide coverage of the new LEADER programme for rural economic development and report in more detail on the success of the funding bid for the new Local Action Group (LAG) Heart of Wessex.

Public Interest

Over the last 5 years much of rural South Somerset has not qualified for the LEADER Programme, which supports locally designed, rural development initiatives. This year, 3 existing programmes have bid for funding to extend their reach within South Somerset resulting in full coverage of SSDC qualifying rural areas. The successor programme is due to run for 5 years from 2015 and will focus on rural economic development.

Recommendation

Members note the success of the bid for programme funding for the Heart of Wessex which, together with Making it Local, gives full LEADER coverage for Area West.

Background

This is an update from the report to all Area Committees in June 2014 about proposals to extend coverage of the LEADER programme in South Somerset from 2015.

Projects funded under the new LEADER Programme (2015-2020) focus on delivering jobs and growth, 70% of all projects funded under LEADER will directly support the rural economy (e.g. through creating and developing micro and small sized rural businesses) 30% of projects will also need to demonstrate that they are contributing to improving the rural economy. The Programme has 6 priorities:

- (1) increasing farm productivity
- (2) micro and small enterprise and farm diversification
- (3) rural tourism
- (4) rural services
- (5) cultural and heritage activity and
- (6) forestry productivity

LAGs have aligned their activities to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP), Local Authorities, Rural Growth Network Pilot areas, Rural and Farming Networks etc. The Local Development Strategies (LDSs) have been written to complement the activities of the relevant LEPs and the LEPs have formally endorsed the LDSs.

The coverage of the 3 LAGs for the new programme all consist of large rural areas, extending well beyond South Somerset with populations approaching 150,000 people each. These are:

- *Making it Local* – largely based on the Blackdown Hills and mainly in Devon. The boundary has been extended eastwards to take in Chard and western parishes of Area West, including the Ilminster area. The accountable body is Devon County Council
- *Heart of Wessex* – follows the A303/A30 corridor area, which is a strong economic area due to the impact of these major transport routes into Wiltshire. In Area West it covers the wards of Eggwood, Crewkerne and Parrett. It also includes some of south Wiltshire, eastern Mendip, all of Area East and rural parts of South (Yeovil is not eligible). The accountable body is Wiltshire Council
- *The Levels and Moors* – is an established area stretching from A303 to the Somerset coast. Minor boundary changes in South Somerset means that it has been possible to consolidate full coverage of Area North. The accountable body is Somerset County Council

Award of Funding for the Programme covering Area West

The scheme managers were notified of the final funding for their programmes earlier in the spring, but the delay in formal announcement was caused by the General Election. All 3 areas covering South Somerset were successful. The combined value of the grant pot for the 2 programmes benefitting Area West is £ 2,796m

The Programme Managers now have the operating manual and training, a call for bids is awaited in the summer. Delivery Plans need to be submitted to the RPA (Rural Payments Agency, now the responsible arm of Defra for this programme) by 31 July 2015 for approval.

Within the above figure the new Heart of Wessex LAG covering the eastern parts of Area West. It has been awarded a grant pot of £1,425m.

New LEADER Programme – Heart of Wessex

The Heart of Wessex LAG held a very well attended launch event at the Cheese & Grain in Frome on Wednesday 17th June, attended by over 150 people. The grant pot secured through the Rural Development Programme is to be invested in projects that directly support the rural economy. It will be able to support innovative projects aimed at increasing farm productivity, developing micro and small enterprises and farm diversification, rural tourism, rural services, cultural and heritage activity and increasing forestry productivity.

Cllr Mike Lewis, Area East, who has been on the Steering Group for the LAG, has now been appointed formally to the Executive Committee . A communication plan will be put in place to ensure that information flows in both directions linking up all 3 Areas within the scope of this programme. Further details of the programme are on the web site: www.heartofwessex.co.uk

Financial Implications

No direct financial implications at this time.

Corporate Priority Implications

The Council Plan states that

We want a strong economy which has low unemployment and thriving businesses

One of the stated ways we will address this is to

Work in partnership to deliver investment and development that local people value

Carbon Emissions & Climate Change Implications

In due course this designation could provide a way to supporting local employment and promote local produce/ services to our communities contributing to greater self-containment thereby reducing carbon emissions

Equality and Diversity Implications

Rural communities are vulnerable to isolation from services and markets and face higher transport cost. This programme provides an opportunity to support locally important economic initiatives

Background Papers: DEFRA guidance documents for LEADER programme
